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The Īśa Upaniṣad

Transcreated from Sanskrit

by P. Lal

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for

J. D. K. ARGLES

"who sees the world as it is

and is not perplexed"

[ĪŚA: 6]

ॐ

THE ĪŚA UPANIṢAD

A new transcreation by P. Lal

1 The world is swaddled in the glory of the Lord.
Renounce it and enjoy it. Do not covet anyone's wealth.

2 All work is bondage: this is the way of the world.
No one escapes.
Loading good deeds with wishes,
A man hopes at most for a hundred years.

3 There are sunless worlds, covered with darkness,
The slayers of the Self go to them after death.

4 But That One, the Unmoving One, is
Swifter than mind, higher than sense,
Faster than flux.
It breathes, and
The world breathes with its breath.

5 It moves, and it does not move;
It is far, and near;
Inside the world, and outside it.

6 The man who sees the world in the Self,
And the Self in the world, sees
The world as it is, and is not perplexed.

7 Sorrow and delusion do not touch him.
The world is one with his Self,
He has seen the Unity of Being!

8 The Self is everywhere!
It has no body!
No sinews!
It is whole, pure, sinless!
It shines!
It is self-born!
It knows!
From it flows the world of moral duty.

9 Plunged into dark darkness
Are worshippers of ignorance;
Plunged into darker darkness
Those whose delight in knowledge.

10 The words of the wise have explained it clearly:
Ignorance will not do!
But knowledge is not enough!

11 The Truth lies beyond,
Beyond knowledge of knowledge and knowledge of ignorance;
Ignorance leads to death, and
Knowledge to after-death.

12 Plunged into dark darkness
Are worshippers of Non-Being;
Into greater darkness those who
Delight in Being.

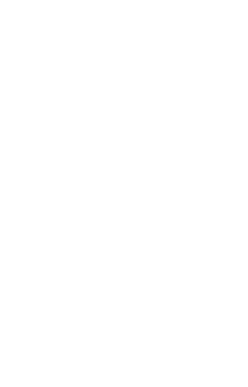
13 The words of the wise have explained it clearly:
Non-Being will not do!
But Being is not enough!

14 The truth lies beyond,
Beyond knowledge of Being and knowledge of Non-Being;
Non-Being leads to death, and
Being to after-death.

15 The womb of the sun is covered with a golden disc.
Remove it!
O Pūṣan, I love the Truth, show me the Truth!

16 O Sun, lonely wanderer, controller and giver of light,
Fold your light around me,
Let me see your face—
The indwelling Being,
I am He!

17 Perish my body! Turn into ashes!
Blend, breath, with immortal wind!
And, O my mind, remember,
Remember past deeds.
O my mind, remember! Past deeds, remember!
Remember, O my mind! Past deeds remember!

18 O Sun, you see through all we do.
Guide us from goodness to joy,
Keep us from wrong-doing and deceit.
Our words pay you homage again and again.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATION

The Īśa Upaniṣad is the second shortest (the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* has 12 ślokas), most concentrated and by general consensus the most obscure work of the Upanisadic canon. It is also traditionally the earliest and most important, for which reason scholars and translators generally place it first in collections of Upaniṣads.

It takes its name from the first word of its first śloka, but it is also sometimes called the Īśāvāsyaṁ Upaniṣad, from the first two words (Īśā vāsyaṁ: "swaddled in the Lord"). Max Müller chose to call it the Vājasaneyi-Saṁhitā Upaniṣad, following the name of the recension of the White Yajur-Veda, because the Īśa, the only Upaniṣad included in a Saṃhitā, concludes the forty chapters of that particular recension. "Īśa" is a good title because the Upaniṣad deals with the ineffable nature of the Unmoving One (the "anejadekaṁ" of its fourth śloka) who is the Supreme Lord (Iśa) of the universe. The Upaniṣad suggests, however, that it is possible to pierce the mystery and experience the nature of the Lord by direct mystical realization of divine reality. Śloka 16 puts it in the following words, "Tat te paśyāmi", "That which I see in you", "so-ahamasmi", "That I am".

The Īśa Upanisad's complexity and ambiguity are frequently referred to by translators and commentators. "This Upaniṣad," wrote Max Müller, "though apparently

simple and intelligible, is in reality one of the most difficult to understand properly. . . . It seems to have dreaded libertinism, knowledge without works, more even than ritualism, works without knowledge, and its true object was to show that orthodoxy and sacrifice, though useless in themselves, must always form the preparation for higher enlightenment." Others explain it very differently. Saṅkarācārya's *ṭikā* on it is well-known, and the interested reader will find its ideas faithfully followed in Swāmi Sharvānanda's translation of the Īśa Upaniṣad, issued by the Śrī Rāmakrishna Maṭha at Mylapore, Madras. I shall refer briefly in my paper to the interpretations of Rām Mohun Roy, Śrī Aurobindo, and Dr. S. Rādhākrishnan, incorporating wherever possible the gist of their views into the body of my argument.

The Īśa Upaniṣad is as close to pure mystical statement, expressed in poetical terms, as any Upaniṣad gets. This is perhaps what attracted Yeats to it so deeply. He quoted from its deservedly famous *śloka* 15 in a broadcast on "Modern Poetry" which he gave in 1936. "I think profound philosophy comes from terror," he said. "An abyss opens under our feet; inherited convictions, pre-suppositions of our thoughts, those Fathers of the Church Lionel Johnson expounded, drop into the abyss. Whether we will or no, we must ask the ancient questions: Is there a reality anywhere? Is there a God? Is there a Soul? We cry with the Indian Sacred Book: 'They have put a golden stopper into the neck of the bottle; pull it!

Let out reality!' " Yeats said this in the course of appreciating the "long philosophical poems" published some seven years after the close of the First World War: Turner's *Seven Days of the Sun*, Dorothy Wellesley's *Matrix*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Herbert Read's *Mutations of the Phoenix*.

It was as poetry, and poetry that combined the angst of spiritual search with the ecstasy of spiritual discovery, that he seems to have seen the Īśa Upaniṣad. The ecstasy of ślokas 5 and 17 needs noting; as also the memorable image of śloka 15 which fascinated Yeats: "The entrance of truth is covered by the disc of the golden sun" (*hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṁ mukhaṃ*). My own feeling—an impression that has grown into conviction during the process of translating the Upaniṣad—is that its "ambiguous" statements appear ambiguous chiefly because of the anonymous poet's concentrated intensity of vision. He has had an intuitive and incommunicable glimpse of the Reality behind the "golden disc" of the sun. The extreme brevity of the Upanisad is another pointer: pure vision shuns prolix communication. The brevity is significantly restricted to 18 ślokas—and we know that the *Mahābhārata* has 18 parvas, and 18 *akṣauhinīs* fight on *dharmakṣetra* Kurukṣetra for 18 days; the *Gītā* is divided into 18 chapters; there are 18 purāṇas and 18 smṛtis or lawbooks; and the nine avatāras of Viṣṇu, seen ambivalently (as incarnations in Hinduism are), add up to 18. The formal structure of the Īśa Upaniṣad has the sanction and

appeal of orthodox, even sacred, numerology. The third pointer, one which emphasises the Upaniṣad's poetic nature, is the numerous references to, and borrowings from, the *Ṛg-Veda.* The "golden disc" echoes the "golden womb" *(hiraṇya garbha)* of the hymn popularly titled "To the Unknown God" (Maṇḍala X Song 121), and there are allusions to *Ṛg-Veda,* Maṇḍala I Song 12 śloka 7, Maṇḍala X Song 34 śloka 8, Maṇḍala X Song 139 śloka 3, and Maṇḍala X Song 16 śloka 3 (the tenth Maṇḍala or Cycle is accepted by scholars as the most lyrical of the Ṛg-Vedic "Cycles"). The last śloka of the Īśa Upaniṣad is an extreme case: R. H. Hume lists 16 references to the *Ṛg Veda* and *Atharva-Veda* connected with śloka 18, which prays for freedom from "crooked" evil *(juhurāṇamenaḥ).* Śloka 18 is, from the *Ṛg-Veda* (Maṇḍala I Song 189, the first śloka), its second line being repeated from the *Atharva-Veda* as well (Maṇḍala IV Song 39 śloka 10).

The Ṛg-Vedic hymn from which the last śloka is lifted is to Agni, the sun god. The Pūsan of śloka 15 of the Īśa Upaniṣad is also the sun (literally the word means "supporter" or "sustainer" but it is generally used as an appellation of the sun). This gains added significance from the fact that the last four ślokas of the Īśa Upaniṣad are specially sacred to orthodox Hindus, and are chanted at the time of cremation as part of the funeral rites. The fire symbolism—and its opposite, darkness and ignorance, the blinding darkness of śloka 3—holds the Īśa Upanisad together: the dazzling fire of the real sun, the ritual fire of

cremation, and the purifying fire of a vision of ultimate Reality.

My aim in this paper is an extremely limited one. I intend to examine the Sanskrit of the 18 ślokas with word-by-word fidelity, giving as literal a translation as possible of each śloka while retaining the word-order of the original. Then I shall place the literal version besides the Yeats-Purohit version. I will comment briefly on important details and try to interpret discreetly wherever necessary. But I shall refrain, as far as possible, from speaking on the merits and defects of the Yeats-Purohit translation, leaving that very difficult critical chore to the discriminating judgment of my audience. I hope that, as I do this, some of the problems that afflict those who translate from Sanskrit into English will come to the notice of my listeners, some of whom must have wondered why Dr. S. Rādhākrishnan in his excellent Bibliography to *The Principal Upaniṣads,* published by Allen & Unwin in 1953, did not see fit to list the Yeats-Purohit version, though he mentioned it in a footnote on page 18. Perhaps Dr. Rādhākrishnan did not think the Yeats-Purohit version a satisfactory one. Yeats himself had other views. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley he wrote, "Our translation of the Upaniṣads is going to be the classic translation. . ."

NOTE: This and what follows is the text of a paper based on a study of the Īśa Upaniṣad in *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (Faber, 1937), presented at the seminar on "Yeats and India" organised by the Comparative Literature Department of Jadavpur University, Calcutta, to commemorate the centenary of Yeats's birth.

ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं
यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा
मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥1॥

1

THE TEXT: 1ST ŚLOKA

īśāvāsyamidaṃ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat |
tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam ||

Literally, retaining the original construction, this can be translated as:

In the Lord is swaddled all which there is in the world changing;
Giving that up, enjoy, do not covet anyone's wealth.

The Yeats-Purohit version is:

Whatever lives is full of the Lord. Claim nothing; enjoy, do not covet his property.

The tricky compound in the first śloka is *īśāvāsyaṁ*. Vāsyaṁ means "clothed", dressed", and translating it as "covered", "enveloped", or, as Yeats does, "is full of", does not quite convey the meaning. "The world is swaddled in the glory of God" is a more satisfactory way of putting it. To translate *kasya svid dhanaṃ* as "His porperty" (meaning the property of the Lord) when the words mean "anyone's wealth", is confusing, specially because the Upaniṣadic philosophy never conceives of the phenomenal world as the "property" of Brahman. It is awkward to have a feudal Divine Lord with private property advising human beings to give up possessions *(tena tyaktena)*.

कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि
जिजीविषेच्छतं समाः ।
एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति
न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ २ ॥

2

2ND ŚLOKA:

kurvanneveha karmāṇi jijīviṣecchataṁ samāḥ ।
evaṁ tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate nare ॥

Literally:

Doing only here deeds, desire to live a hundred years,
Thus for you no choice is but this, never work stains man.

The Yeats-Purohit version is:

Then hope for a hundred years of life doing your duty.
No other way can prevent deeds from clinging, proud as you are of your human life.

"Doing your duty" and "proud as you are of your human life" are nowhere in the original, and the all important "For you no choice is but this" is changed into "No other way can prevent deeds from clinging." And *lip* does not mean "to cling" except in the Prakrit: in Sanskrit the word means to "smear, anoint, taint, pollute, stain, defile." A verv important idea—the staining quality of action, *any* action—is missed.

असुर्या नाम ते लोका
अन्धेन तमसावृताः ।
तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति
ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥३॥

3

3RD ŚLOKA:

asūryā nāma te loka andhena tamasāvṛtaḥ ।
tāṃste pretyābhigacchanti ye ke cātmahano janāḥ ॥

Literally:

Sunless certainly those worlds (with) blind darkness covered;
Those they after death attain who are slayers-of-Atman persons.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

They that deny the Self, return after death to a godless birth, blind, enveloped in darkness

Ātmahano cannot be translated "denial of the Self"—it is much more emphatic—the root *hat* means to kill, destroy, violate sexually. One has good reason to wonder why those who "deny the Self", which has ascetic and intellectual connotations, should be doomed to such fearful punishment. Śrī Aurobindo explained that there are two readings of the first word—*asuryā* (godless, demonic), and *asūryā* (sunless). The second, "sunless", which seems to me fundamentally related to the total fire symbolism of the Īśa Upaniṣad, is completely ignored by Yeats and Purohit.

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो
नैनद्देवा आप्नुवन्पूर्वमर्षत् ।
तद्धावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्
तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥4॥

4

4TH ŚLOKA:

anajedekaṃ manaso javīyo nainad devā āpnuvan pūrvamarṣat ।
tad dhāvato'nyānatyeti tiṣṭhat tasminnapo mātariśvā dadhāti ॥

Literally:

Unmoving One than mind faster, not fully the senses reach,
It running other objects outstrips, standing it even cosmic energy sustains.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

The Self is one. Unmoving, it moves faster than the mind. The senses lag, but the Self runs ahead. Unmoving, it outruns pursuit, Out of Self comes the breath that is the life of all things.

This is beautifully and accurately translated. The word *mātariśvan*, "cosmic energy", or, in the Yeats-Purohit version, "the breath that is the life of all things," is actually an appellation of the sun god Agni, and is sometimes given to the messenger Vivasvat, who brings down the hidden Fire to the Bhṛghus.

तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्दूरे तद्वन्तिके ।
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥5॥

5

5TH ŚLOKA:

> *tadejati tannaijati tad dūre tadvantike* ।
> *tadantarasya tad u sarvasyāsya bāhyataḥ* ॥

Literally:

> *That moves, that not moves, that far, that also near,*
> *That within is of all, that also of all outside.*

Yeats does a beautiful job of this:

> *Unmoving, it moves; is far away, yet near; within all, outside all.*

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।
सर्व भूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ ६ ॥

6

6TH ŚLOKA:

yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmanyevānupaśyati ।
sarvabhūteṣu cātmanaṁ tato na vijugupsate ॥

Literally:

And who all created things also the Atman itself sees,
In all created things also the Atman, as a result is not anguished.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

Of a certainty the man who can see all creatures in himself, himself in all creatures, knows no sorrow.

How "himself" is a correct translation of *ātman* only very precise Sanskritists can say, but it is evident from the text that no personal involvement is suggested. The Ātman is never given a gender; it is always the neuter *tat* (That). This does not emerge from Yeats' "who can see all creatures in himself, himself in all creatures."

यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥ 7 ॥

7

7TH ŚLOKA:

> *yasmin sarvāṇi būtānyātmaivābūd vijānataḥ* ।
> *tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śokaḥ ekatvamanupaśyataḥ* ॥

Literally:

> *When all created things Ātman truly has become to one who knows,*
> *Then where grief, where delusion to the Oneness-seer.*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *How can a wise man, knowing the unity of life, seeing all creatures in himself, be deluded or sorrowful?*

"Unity of life" is an excellent rendering of *ekatvam* (Oneness), but one is left wondering why Yeats, who wrote of it elsewhere so often, did not go in for the more significant phrase, "Unity of Being".

स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रण-
मस्नाविरं शुद्धमपापविद्धम् ।
कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयंभूर्याथा-
तथ्यतोऽर्थान्व्यदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः ॥८॥

8

8TH ŚLOKA:

sa paryagācchukramakāyamavraṇamasnāviraṁ
śuddhamapāpaviddham ।
kavirmanīṣī paribhūḥ svyayambhūr yāthātathyato'
arthan vyadadhācchāśvatībhyaḥ samābhyaḥ ॥

Literally:

He all-pervading, radiant, faultless, without sinews, pure,
sinless and without ignorance;
All-seeing, all-knowing, all-encompassing, self-born, in
the right way activity assigned for endless ages.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

The Self is everywhere, without a body, without a shape,
whole, pure wise, all-knowing, far shining, self
depending, all transcending; in the eternal procession
assigning to every period its proper duty.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति
ये अविद्यामुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो
य उ विद्यायां रताः ॥९॥

9

9TH ŚLOKA:

> *andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti ye' avidyāmupāsate* ।
> *tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyāṁ rataḥ* ॥

Literally:

> *Blind darkness enter they who non-knowledge worship;*
> *Than that greater even they darkness who but knowledge delight in*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *Pin your faith to natural knowledge, stumble through the darkness of the blind; pin your faith to supernatural knowledge, stumble through a darkness deeper still.*

This śloka is one of the most obscure in the Upaniṣadic canon. Śaṁkarācārya interpreted *avidyā* to mean "ritualistic observances". *Avidyā* means "ignorance" or "non-knowledge", and Yeats renders that into "natural knowledge", whetever that means (it could mean knowledge of phenomenal nature, or instinctual knowledge). No commentator has explained why worshippers of knowledge are said by the Īśa Upaniṣad to plunge into an even greater darkness than worshippers of "ignorance". Perhaps there is a suggestion that intellectual pride, like intellectual hatred, is the worst.

अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्यया अन्यदाहुरविद्यया ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचचक्षिरे ॥१०॥

10

10TH ŚLOKA:

> *anyadevāhur vidyayā anyadāhuravidyayā* ।
> *iti śuśruma dhīrāṇāṁ ye nastad vicacakṣire* ॥

Literally:

> *Different indeed they say by knowledge, different they say by non-knowledge:*
> *This we have heard from the wise who to us that have explained.*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *Natural knowledge brings one result, supernatural knowledge another. We have heard it from the wise who have clearly explained it.*

But they do not seem to have "clearly explained" why delighted pursuit of knowledge brings worse consequences than worship of non-knowledge.

विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।
अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ ११ ॥

11

11TH ŚLOKA:

> *vidsāṁ cāvidyāṃ ca yastad vedobhayaṁ saha* ।
> *avidyayā mṛityuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtamaśnute* ॥

Literally:

> *Knowledge and non-knowledge, who that knows both together;*
> *By non-knowledge death having conquered, by knowledge non-death attains.*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *They that know and can distinguish between natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge shall, by the first, cross the perishable in safety; shall, passing beyond the second, attain immortal life.*

This is a rather far-fetched piece of interpretation, because the original nowhere suggests the need for discriminating between non-knowledge and knowledge; it uses a blanket word, *veda*, meaning "knows". True, knowledge implies discrimination, but in that case the word *jñāna* would have been used, not *vidyā*. Also, the idea of "passing beyond" supernâtural knowledge in order to attain immortality *(amrta)* is pure Yeats.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽसंभूतिमुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ संभूत्यां रताः ॥ १२ ॥

12

12TH ŚLOKA:

> *andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti ye' asambhūtimupāsate* ।
> *tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u sambhūtyāṁ ratāḥ* ॥

Literally:

> *Blind darkness enter they who the unmanifest worship;*
> *Than that greater even they darkness who but the*
> *manifest delight in.*

The Yeats-Purohit version·

> *Pin your faith to the seed of nature, stumble through the darkness of the blind; pin your faith to the shapes of nature, stumble through a darkness deeper still.*

Asambhūti is an elusive word. Śrī Aurobindo translates it as "Non-Birth", Dr. Rādhākrishnan says "Unmanifest", R E Hume uses "non-becoming", Max Müller prefers "what is not the true cause", Prabhāvānanda and Manchester have a simple word for it, "body", Rām Mohun Roy chose "Prakriti", Swāmi Nikhilānanda elaborates it into "the unmanifested Prakriti", Swāmi Chinmayānanda says it means the "Impersonal-God", and Juan Mascaró (in the recent Penguin translation) thinks it means "transcendent". The dictionary meaning is unambiguous: "asambhūti" is "the unmanifested". Yeats' rendering, "the seed of nature", is a pleasing but uneasy blend of Vedāntic philosophy (Prakṛti is often explained as primordial nature) and Lake District poetic sentiment.

अन्यदेवाहुः संभवादन्यदाहुरसंभवात् ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचचक्षिरे ॥13॥

13

13TH ŚLOKA:

anyadevāhuḥ sambhavādanyadāhurasambhavāt ।
iti śuśruma dhīrāṇāṁ ye nastad vicacakṣire ॥

Literally:

Different indeed they say by manifest, different they say by unmanifest:
This we have heard from the wise who to us that have explained.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

The seed of nature brings one result; the shapes of nature another. We have heard it from the wise, who have clearly explained it.

संभूतिं च विनाशं च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।
विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा संभूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥१४॥

14

14TH ŚLOKA:

> *sambhūti ca vināśaṁ ca yastad vedobhayaṁ saha* ।
> *vināśena mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā sambhūtyāmṛtamśnute* ॥

Literally:

> *The manifest and the annihilated, who that knows both together,*
> *By the annihilated death having conquered, by the manifest immortality attains.*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *They that know and can distinguish between the shapes of nature and the seed of nature shall, by the first, cross the perishable in safety; shall, passing beyond the second, attain immortal life.*

A very significant change in idea takes place in the text of this śloka. Instead of the previous *asambhūti*, "unmanifested", śloka 14 has *vināśaṁ* contrasted with *sambhūti* *Vināśaṁ* means destruction, doom, annihilation, but in such annihilation, according to its lexical meaning, there is the implicit nuance of re-birth. The suggestion of a cyclic process, that the manifested becomes, through destruction, the unmanifested, and is again manifested in the round of the cosmic pattern, does not emerge in Yeats' translation.

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।
तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥ 15 ॥

15

15TH ŚLOKA:

> *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukhaṁ* ı
> *tat tvaṁ pūṣannapāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye* ıı

Literally:

> *With a golden platter of truth is covered the face;*
> *That you, O Pūṣan, remove for a truth-follower to see.*

The Yeats-Purohit version.

> *They have put a golden stopper into the neck of the bottle. Pull it, Lord! Let out reality. I am full of longing*

This simply will not do. Sir Monier-Williams defines *pātra* in the Oxford *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* as "utensil, plate, pot, goblet" and Āpte gives it as "vessel or jar"; Devasthali, Joshi and Kulkarṇi, in their short dictionary, also give the same meaning Prabhāvānanda and Manchester have "orb", Max Müller uses "disk", Śrī Aurobindo has "lid", Juan Mascaró uses "circle" and Hume prefers "vessel" The idea apparently is that the dazzling sun, like a round golden vessel, blinds us to the reality behind it. Bottles did not exist in Upaniṣadic times, and here is an example of Yeatsian transcreation that distorts the original's meaning, and verges on transcorruption. It is not suggested that Reality is bottled up and has to be released; rather, Reality is everywhere, but human eyes are deceived by the brilliant seductions of the physical senses and fail to see it. The opening line of the Upanisad is a prayer to the Lord to remove the dazzle of his glory so that his devoted seekers may find him.

पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्रजापत्य
व्यूह रश्मीन्समूह तेजः।
यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि
योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥१६॥

16

16TH ŚLOKA:

pūṣannekarṣe yama sūrya prajāpatya vyūha raśmin samūha tejaḥ ।
yat te rūpaṁ kalyāṇatamaṁ tat te paśyāmi yo sāvasou puruṣaḥ so' ahamasmi ॥

Literally:

The supporter, the lonely wanderer, the controller, the son of Prajāpati, remove, the rays withdraw;
The light which through your form supremely gracious, that I see; that Being, that I am.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

Protector, seer, controller of all, fountain of life,
upholder, do not waste light; gather light; let me see that
blessed body—Lord of all. I myself am He.

वायुरनिलममृतम थेदं
भस्मान्तं शरीरम् ।
ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर
क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर ॥17॥

17

17TH ŚLOKA:

> *vāyuranilamṛtamathedaṁ bhasmāntaṁ śarīram* ।
> *auṁ kṛto smara kṛtaṁ smara krato smara kṛtaṁ smara* ॥

Literally:

> *Breath, all-pervading air, immortality, now this reduced-to-ashes body:*
>
> *Oṁ. O mind, remember, past deeds remember, O mind, remember, past deeds remember.*

The Yeats-Purohit version:

> *Life, merge into the all-prevalent, the eternal; body, turn to ashes. Mind, meditate on the eternal Spirit; remember past deeds. Mind! remember past deeds; remember, Mind! remember.*

अग्ने नया सुपथा राये अस्मान्
विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान् ।
युयोध्यस्मज्जुहुराणमेनो
भूयिष्ठां ते नम-उक्तिं विधेम ॥ १८ ॥

18

18TH ŚLOKA:

agne naya supathā rāye asmān viśvāni deva vayunāni
vidvān ।
yuyodhyasmajjuharāṇameno bhūyiṣṭhāṃ te nama-uktiṁ
vidhema ॥

Literally:

O Agni, lead by the good path to enjoy fruits us, all,
O Lord, deeds knowing,
Destroy in us crooked evil, innumerable to you words of
homage we offer.

The Yeats-Purohit version:

Holy light! illuminate the way that we may gather the
good we planted. Are not our deeds known to you?
Do not let us grow crooked, we that kneel and pray
again and again.

In the letter to Dorothy Wellesley to which I have already referred, Yeats wrote that he found the "Swāmi always profound and unexpected. The Swāmi is a constant instruction and delight. He puts sugger in his soup, in his salad, in his vegetables, and then unexpectedly puts salt on stewed pears. Sometimes he mixes salt, sugger and pepper, merely I think because his eyes light on them. He says 'I like all the six flavours but prefer sugger'."

On which note I should like to end my paper, leaving you to determine what kind of flavouring was used by the two translators in their Īśa Upaniṣad, and whether you would prefer "sugger" instead, as I do.

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